

“What’s It To You?”  
B, Pentecost 17; Mark 8:27-38  
September 16, 2018; 10:00 am  
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO  
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

**Mark 8:27-38**

<sup>27</sup>Then Jesus and his disciples went away to the villages near Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Tell me, who do people say I am?”

<sup>28</sup>“Some say that you are John the Baptist,” they answered; “others say that you are Elijah, while others say that you are one of the prophets.”

<sup>29</sup>“What about you?” he asked them. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

<sup>30</sup>Then Jesus ordered them, “Do not tell anyone about me.”

## Jesus Speaks about His Suffering and Death

<sup>31</sup>Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: “The Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. He will be put to death, but three days later he will rise to life.” <sup>32</sup>He made this very clear to them. So Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup>But Jesus turned around, looked at his disciples, and rebuked Peter. “Get away from me, Satan,” he said. “Your thoughts don't come from God but from human nature!”

<sup>34</sup>Then Jesus called the crowd and his disciples to him. “If any of you want to come with me,” he told them, “you must forget yourself, carry your cross, and follow me. <sup>35</sup>For if you want to save your own life, you will lose it; but if you lose your life for me and for the gospel, you will save it. <sup>36</sup>Do you gain anything if you win the whole world but lose your life? Of course not! <sup>37</sup>There is nothing you can give to regain your life. <sup>38</sup>If you are ashamed of me and of my teaching in this godless and wicked day, then the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

### **I. DIFFERENT PLACES ON THE JOURNEY**

We went on a retreat this week, the TELLS group from CUCC and friends. (If you're wondering what the heck TELLS stands for, it's the “Tuesday Evening Ladies Literary Society,” so named by our dearly departed Beth Dwyer, with a little help from friends.)

We, eight of us ladies, and one lady dog named Chloe, went to Judy and Ron Hassell's wonderful cabin in Taylor Park. Of course, we had to go the LOOONNNGGGG way around, since Cottonwood Pass is closed, but the long way was stunning and gorgeous and we have no complaints! God's glory in the colors this Fall is surely something to behold, is it not?

While on retreat, we did some hiking and ‘sploring. We walked, hiked, 4-wheeled, moseyed – all according to ability and interest. Those abilities and *mobilities* were varied, but all valued, embraced and celebrated.

Some walked awhile and found their legs and lungs were longing for more of an amble or a strategically-placed chair or blanket in the sun with a dear friend for meaningful conversation. These ones were discovered later, looking *much* like St. Francis, communing with the birds and sharing their bread and fruit.

Others hiked a ways and reveled in the surrounds—looking at flowers and mines and beautiful colors; taking pictures – venturing as much as felt good and worked with *their* body’s altitude and attitude adjustment. *We all*, and our knees, had some *attitude* about that hill!

Still others welcomed a chance to stretch legs long and explore wide the territory we found ourselves in—trailblazing a bit, traipsing up and over the road, the path, the cattle guards and gates. Who needs a gym when you live in Colorado, right?!

But, it’s about so much *more* than physical exercise – this retreating in and communing with Nature. For the Spirit of God truly is present in myriad ways with us when we open ourselves to the wonder and mystery of the natural world. As the Celts knew long centuries ago, God and Christ find us in the outdoor cathedrals as much as the indoor.

In those moments, I for one, found myself *exhilarated!* By the beauty, the feel of the air and the sun on my skin and soul; the exertion, and the chance to charge-on ahead a bit – deep in prayer and reflection.

Encouraged by others to adventure at my own pace (which I’m *ever* so grateful for!), I pondered this question for today: “Who do YOU say that I am?” that Jesus asks us. And meditated on the all-so-different answers that arise and have arisen in every time and place since Jesus walked this earth.

These kaleidoscopic answers—starting with Peter and the disciples, and the crowdsourcing they were doing, as Jesus asked point blank: “Who do people say that I am? And, “Who do *you* say that I am?” “Who am I to *you*?” might be an even more *pointed* question for them, and for us.

As I plunged up the steep trail, step by step, asking my lungs to please come with me (!), I thought how that answer is different for each soul, and *should* be. I remembered this graphic that’s on your insert that I stumbled across years ago, and has always spoken volumes and struck me as pretty cool.

I’ve used this artwork in many settings, including Confirmation Class, as I’ve encouraged followers of Jesus Christ to make the journey their own. To answer that question for *themselves* – no matter what age or stage on the road of faith.

You could also use this as a coloring prayer. Color in the various names and say them aloud or to yourself and consider: does this name for Christ *resonate* with me, or do I *cringe* a little at this one? Have I even *heard* this one before?

These are ALL in the bible. They may not necessarily get the same *weight* but they are there because they meant something to someone or some community at some point in time. *All valid. All expressions of trying to understand and name the Mystery of our faith.*

## **II. WHO WAS JESUS FOR THE FIRST DISCIPLES?**

You see, since the moment Jesus' birth was predicted by the angels to Mary and Joseph, Jesus' disciples, apostles and followers (and yes, family!) have been trying to answer this question for themselves. To puzzle out "who is this Jesus?" In various times and places, and in differing places on the journey and belief systems.

This climax moment in the gospel that we heard today is one of those pivotal times. Jesus asks the disciples: "What are people saying about me?" Not in an ego-centric way, trying to win a popularity contest; and not as a test with a right or wrong answer. But honest curiosity. "What's the buzz?"

The disciples then give a report of the rumors in the air: "You remind them of John the Baptist, or Elijah. They believe you're a current-day prophet, much like those prophets of the past."

And then, he turns the question directly to them: And what about *you*? What am I to *you*? What is this journey, this community, this new way of life to you? Who do *you* say I am, my friends?

Marcus Borg describes the moment like this: "Peter says, 'You are the Messiah.' (Reminder: "Messiah" and "Christ" are synonyms, 'Messiah' from the Hebrew word and 'Christ' from the Greek word.) To be the Messiah is a status greater than being like John, Elijah, or the prophets.

"The understanding of what the Messiah would be like was fluid in first-century Judaism: different groups had different expectations. But all who longed for the Messiah agreed on two features: (1) he would be *anointed* by the Spirit of God and (2) he would be the *decisive* figure of Israel's history. The Messiah would usher in God's future, which God intended for Israel and the world. The Messiah would be more than "just" another prophet. Peter's confession means: you are the **one we have been waiting for** – the anointed and promised one of God."

## **III. WHO IS JESUS FOR US TODAY?**

Note that Jesus did not proclaim *himself* as "the Messiah" or "the Son of God," and did not call people to believe that he was. He left it for *us* to wrestle with, to spend our lives figuring out what that means for us, in our time and place and community; and, what it means to follow this one – the One we've been waiting for.

Kate Matthews also reflects on this for our times:

Every way we turn in the life of the church, we seem to hear the question of "who Jesus is." More conservative voices seem to have a clear and compelling answer about Jesus' identity and the requirement, first, to accept him as our Lord and Savior, and, second, to convince others to do the same.

More progressive voices seem to strive to explore the mystery of who Jesus *was* and who Jesus *is* in our lives today; they also seem to focus on Jesus' actions in order to understand his identity. Do you find a clear answer more compelling than a mystery? Both have their power in our lives, and perhaps we need both: clear answers and an appreciation of mystery.

What we have heard ("Who do others say that I am?") and what we have been taught is important, but so is the *encounter* we have with Jesus the Christ in our *own* lives and in the life of the church. Is this a question that you spend much time contemplating? Commentators agree that not only Peter but the rest of the disciples must have recognized Jesus as the Messiah (see Andrew in John 1:41); why else, they ask, would those disciples have given up everything to follow him? In a setting where most people claim to be followers of Christ (and few of us give up everything to follow him), perhaps there is a second question in our own lives: "So what?" So, what will we do, today, in our lives, if we accept Jesus as the Messiah?

What does *your* understanding of who Jesus is mean for your life? Does it compel you to *follow*, and what does that look like in daily life? How is your journey different because you are a follower of Christ? These are some of the questions we will be delving-into together this Fall. I hope you'll join us on that explore.

"If any of you want to come with me," he told them, "you must forget yourself, carry your cross, and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For if

you want to save your own life, you will lose it; but if you lose your life for me and for the gospel, you will save it. <sup>36</sup> Do you gain anything if you win the whole world but lose your life? Of course not! <sup>37</sup> There is nothing you can give to regain your life.

#### **IV. CONTINUING THE JOURNEY**

I continued my hike up that hill.

I felt an urge to press on ahead; scouting out the trail, checking for moose, of course, and not getting off by myself *too* far. Watching the time and the distance, so I could help us know when and where to turn around.

We'd made a commitment to Marge that we would all re-gather and get her back to her car in plenty of time to drive the long trek home. She was committed to starting the Celtic Prayer Gathering on Wednesday morning in the Rainbow Room, and we wanted to support her in that.

You see, for Marge, what it *means* to answer the question of who Christ is, and to follow in the Way is to help others explore that Divine Presence in prayer. She teaches a variety of spiritual practices – many learned from the Celtic tradition – so that others can find Christ on the journey for themselves.

(She was a little nervous about the Pastor's 4-wheeling expertise, so we made sure to take our time getting back to her car!)

#### **V. WHAT'S AROUND THE BEND?**

As I explored ideas and the trail, I thought about the season ahead of us as a church, and this journey we're embarking on this Fall to learn more about Jesus and The Way he invites us to follow. How we asking the question: "Where Would Jesus Lead? for ourselves, in these times; looking back to where followers have been led in eons past, and forward to where *our* journey leads us.

I thought about how much my heart longs to keep going "**just a little more**" – when I hike and ride and read and lead – pretty much anytime! What's around the next bend? What's on the road ahead? Surely, we'll get to an easier flat stretch soon?!

Surely, there will be a warm, sunny spot to stop, soak it all in, and turn around. Maybe a photo opp or two – maybe a moose or a beaver in that meadow! I *always* have that curiosity of a child – what's next?! Are we *there* yet?!

We come from all different attitudes, experiences, and altitudes! We come with differing faith traditions, biblical knowledge and study, spiritual experiences of Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit. Just as that picture in front of you expresses *thousands* of different individuals' descriptions and experiences of Christ, so we bring just as many to this journey.

I will scout on ahead and explore the countless ways followers have responded to Jesus over time, as well as some of the myriad understandings of who Jesus was and is for us. I will bring these discoveries to you, so

we can discover together what connects for us in our time and place.

## **VI. A SIGN ON THE TRAIL**

Suddenly, a beautiful brook appeared on the trail. With wide, flat stepping stones to cross with ease. I didn't see them at first. My first thought was: Oh boy! Here's where I must stop and encourage the others to turn around as well. This is treacherous and foot-soaking to get across. Wet and slippery. But once I got right up to it, I saw it was quite welcoming: Big, flat, dry rocks laid out a perfect path and I hopped across easily.

And *then*, it was clear that just *beyond* that brook was *the* place to turn around. For the road was no longer a curiosity – next bend – but a straight, very steep, right up the hill-no-chance-to-breathe next chapter. "Here's your sign!" God said to me ☺.

Maybe *next* Fall we'll keep exploring *that* stretch of the road ahead; *that* challenge on the journey.

On the journey of faith – we have different understandings. Different signs. Who would WE say Jesus is?

Peter gave HIS answer. The Apostle Paul had different understandings than Peter. John different than James. Mary's was different than Lydia's.

We are each asked to give ours. Who do you say Jesus is? What name for Christ would you give on the spot that most resonates for you – touches your heart?

No one person's understanding is necessarily BETTER than another's – ALL are valid. All are to be explored and pondered.

Like the hiking group, everyone's place on the journey is valued, welcomed and honored.

“No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.” Different understandings, different experiences—past, present and future – no one better than another, or more advanced. It's not a hierarchy, nor is it a race up the trail!

Whoever you believe Jesus Christ to be, it oughta show in your living, loving and leading on the journey. They'll know we are followers by our love, right? What's it to *you*? What's it *to* you? Who do YOU say Jesus is, and how does it make a difference in your way in the world?

### **Who Do You Say I Am?**

(by Pam Mark Hall)

Who do you say I am? Now that I've lived out my song,  
I've lived it without any wrong,  
My motive has always been love.

Who do you say I am? Now that the blind man can see,  
Now that the cripple can leap,  
Now that the leper is clean?  
Who do you say I am? Who do you say I am?

Who do you say I am?  
You've seen the power in me,  
To pardon the one who believes,  
The new life I offer is free.  
Who do you say I am? Who do you say I am?

You are the Lord, You are the Christ,  
You are the Holy Messiah,  
That was promised to us from days of old.

You are the Lord, You are the Christ,  
You are the Holy Messiah,  
And it's You alone that we adore.

You are the Lord, You are the Christ,  
You are the Holy Messiah,  
That was promised to us from days of old.  
You are the Lord, You are the Christ,  
You are the Holy Messiah,  
We will follow You all of our lives.

CHRIST OF MANY FACES

